

He built empire in Kewaunee Co.

The man many consider the father of Kewaunee County moved to there in about 1856.

Edward Decker, a native of Casco, Maine, purchased 10,000 acres. He selected a site in the middle of these holdings and named it after his hometown in Maine.

Settlers thirsty for land were eager to buy from Decker. With the proceeds from these sales, Decker built an imposing home that stood where the Casco Post Office now is located. Locally, it was known as the "Little White House."

Decker served as county clerk and established or was heavily involved with a number of banks along the Lakeshore.

He was the founder and publisher of *The Kewaunee Enterprise*, which is still being published. He also owned newspapers in Algo-

ma and Green Bay.

Along with a number of other well-placed individuals, Decker was responsible for the railroads coming to the Door-Kewaunee Peninsula. Construction on the Ahnapee & Western Railroad began in 1892. The railroad connected with the Green Bay and Western Railroad at Casco Junction and ran to Sturgeon Bay via Algoma.

Decker outlived his four wives and three of his six children. He was well-traveled as evidence by the numerous artifacts in his collection. He collected rare books and letters of important people.

Decker was not without detractors.

His buying a substitute for himself to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War did not sit well with settlers' families whose sons he was in charge of drafting to serve in the Union Army. As



Throughout this year of Wisconsin's Sesquicentennial celebration, the Press-Gazette will publish a series of stories on local history. This feature, prepared with the assistance of the Brown County Historical Society, will appear on Mondays.



deputy provost marshal he was in charge of prosecuting those who deserted or evaded the draft. He has been accused of predatory practices in his dealings with others. In 1907 Decker had a reversal of his fortunes and lost everything but his personal property. His funeral in 1911 was paid for by a Green Bay doctor.

Upon his death, Decker left to Kewaunee County his artifacts, books and personal correspondence. For many years these artifacts were on display in a special room at the Kewaunee County Courthouse. They included a 1779 George Washington letter, a plan for Mount Vernon and a John Jay letter. The latter was the corresponding secre-

tary of the Second Continental Congress.

Many of Decker's books and papers are now housed in the Area Research Center at the UW-Green Bay where they are available to serious researchers.

Many of his artifacts and copies of the Washington and Jay letters are on display in the Kewaunee Coun-

ty Historical Museum on Courthouse Square.

His home in Casco, once the center of a 1,500-acre estate, later was divided into apartments after the property changed hands. In 1962, a fire leveled the building.

Submitted by Jerry Abitz, Kewaunee County Historical Society



Kewaunee County Historical Society
Edward Decker's imposing home in Casco was known locally as "The Little White House." After his death, it was divided into apartments. It burned to the ground during this 1952 fire.